〈論　文〉

〈Paper〉

能力が低くてやる気がない大学生に対して 二つの学習アプローチをくらべる

A comparison of two classroom approaches in low-level university compulsory English courses

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抄　録

　この論文では次の2点を考察している。(1) 能力が低くてやる気がない大学生を対象とした学生中心のようなタスクベースラーニング (TBL) などのコミュニケーションのための学習アプローチ (CLT) にはいくつかの難点がある。(2) こういう大学生にはプレゼンテーション、プラクティス、プロダクション (PPP) として知られている伝統的なアプローチを勧めたい。

キーワード：タスクベースラーニング、コミュニケーションのための学習、プレゼンテーション、プラクティス、プロダクション、第二言語習得

Abstract

This essay addresses some of the difficulties involved in carrying out a task-based learning approach to communicative language teaching in Japanese low-level university compulsory English courses, and defends the traditional presentation-practice-production approach.

Key words and phrases: task-based learning (TBL); communicative language teaching (CLT); presentation–practice–production (PPP); second language acquisition (SLA)

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Contents

Abbreviations

CLT : communicative language teaching

SLA : second language acquisition

PPP : presentation-practice-production

TBL : task-based learning

Introduction

Since the English language teaching reforms of the 1980s, the Japanese government has increased measures aimed at improving English language education. These efforts have resulted in more communication-based approaches to language teaching at the secondary and university levels. The influx of native-speaking language teachers on government-sponsored programs such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program and the increased recruitment of native-speaking teachers by universities indicates broad efforts aimed at raising

the level of communicative English ability of Japan's next generation.

Also in the last two decades, linguists have made significant progress in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) research. This research has led to new theories and communication-based approaches, which aim to bring the latest SLA research findings to the classroom.

Since the early days of communicative language teaching (CLT) in Japan, native-speaking teachers have consistently adhered to an approach known as presentation-practice-production (PPP). This approach is considered to be the traditional approach to CLT (Skehan 1996). Recently, however, it has been the subject of intense criticism based on SLA research. Critics of PPP claim this approach has not been shown to move learners toward language acquisition in the way it was designed to do.

A more recent alternative to PPP is called task-based learning (TBL). This approach is rooted in the most recent SLA research findings and is an attempt to work with students' natural developmental processes. TBL theory rests on the belief that language acquisition begins with authentic language use and that learners' experience of the language should begin with the expression of meaning.

Teachers must consider whether learners can accept an approach such as TBL. TBL is student-centered, and assumes a high level of intrinsic motivation. It requires learners to initiate communication independently and engage in a significant amount of linguistic risk-taking. Learners may not overtly reject a model such as this, but it may become a source of anxiety and, in turn, have an adverse affect on learning.

In the case of low-level university students in compulsory classes, students are likely to be resistant to an approach such as TBL. A TBL model conflicts with most students' classroom experience and is probably not suitable for those in the low-level category who are not intrinsically motivated.

A PPP approach is more likely to be the most balanced method by which to give this category of students a positive, yet limited, experience of communicative English instruction.

1. Communicative language education

Since the post-war education system began, English has been a compulsory subject in junior and senior high school (Aspinall 2003). The government has, however, in response to Japan's "remarkable progress on internationalization in recent years" (*Monbusho** 1998) called for greater emphasis on speaking and communication in English language education. A primary aim is

> to develop a practical ability to communicate in a foreign language with skills of understanding a speaker's information or intentions, and of expressing one's thoughts, etc.; to understand the language and culture more deeply through learning the language, thus highly motivated to communicate in it.
>
> (Shoseki 1999:2)

Hood (2001:59) states,

> ...the new Course of Study places more emphasis on communication skills. Textbooks also have more emphasis on communication and conversation, rather than the development of grammatical skills.

Another attempt by the administration to improve communicative English language education was the introduction of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program (Hood 2001). Since 1987 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Home affairs has actively promoted this program. The annual increase in the number of JET teachers has grown substantially from less than 1,000 in 1987 to over 5,000 in 1999 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000 in Hood 2001). This program is a way to expose students to foreigners and their respective countries and cultures, and to offer Japanese youngsters an opportunity to experience the English language as it is really used.

2. Compulsory English at low-level universities

Compulsory English has become a part of university curriculums serving as a continuation to the six years of study students have received in secondary school. "Those who go on to university or junior college will continue to study English for at least two more years. (This is regardless of the subject they have decided to specialize in at degree level.)" (Aspinall 2003: 3).

Private institutions comprise approximately three-quarters of the total number of institutions and fall into a broad range of levels. Sugimoto claims, "...institutions of higher education differ greatly not only in repute but in the nature and quality of the education provided and the quality of their students. Though called universities and colleges, most cases in the bottom half of this group of institutions do not really deserve the label" (1997 : 110). Having worked at both high and low-level universities, I have witnessed a marked contrast in motivation and general disposition of the different levels of students toward language learning. Many of the low-level institutions grant students entrance regardless of test results. These schools serve as a kind of "rescue mechanism for mediocre and low performers at high school" (Sugimoto 1997 : 111). Students in this category present a number of difficulties for teachers who are set on implementing a student-centered CLT approach such as TBL.

3. Second language acquisition (SLA) : a definition

Since the term second language acquisition (SLA) will be referred to frequently in the next sections, a definition is necessary for the sake of clarity. SLA refers to the acquisition of both formal and communicative competence in the target language. Communicative competence may be defined as "an assertion that learners not only need to know the grammar and vocabulary of the target language; they must also acquire the skills necessary to use the language in communication" (Willis 1997 : 8).

4. Presentation, practice, production (PPP)

The approach known as presentation-practice-production (PPP) is considered the traditional approach to communicative language teaching (Skehan 1996). The CLT profession has been reluctant to overcome the dominance of this approach in spite of recent criticism based on SLA research. PPP is the fundamental and often the only method used in English language teacher training courses (Willis 1996 et al). The reasons are simple : PPP is a convenient and commonsensical format by which to teach and follows logical sequence of activities leading to quasi communication activities.

In the presentation stage the teacher typically presents a language structure. For example, *"What do you think of _____?"* This structure is highlighted in a dialogue (see

Figure 1). Next, students practice the structure by reading the dialogue with a partner, and substituting parts of the conversation with new information (shown in italics). Finally, students attempt to produce the form in communication gap activities.

Figure 1   A PPP lesson format

Listen to the conversation. Then practice with a partner.

A: What do you think of *our new English teacher?*
B: I think *he's really nice.* What about you?
A: Actually, I think *he's a little unfriendly.*
B: Oh, really? But do you think *he's a good teacher?*
A: Oh, yes, I do.

Now use the words below to make three more conversations.

1	2	3
the university coffee shop	*Sarah's new boyfriend*	*that new nightclub*
it's really good	*he's very interesting*	*it's great*
it's very expensive	*he's a little boring*	*it's too noisy*
the food is good	*he's good-looking*	*the music is good*

(Buckingham 2002:2 et al)

5. SLA Research

According to critics of PPP, this approach suggests that language mastery can be achieved in a logical, step-by-step process. PPP implies, they argue, that learner intake directly corresponds with teacher input ? that acquisition can be predicted and controlled by the teacher, the syllabus and the lesson and that language can be acquired one item at a time (Willis 1996 et al.). This is referred to as the "accumulated entities" view of language learning (Rutherford 1987). Opponents of PPP claim the approach has not been shown to move learners toward language acquisition in the way it was designed to do. Recent developments in SLA research suggest overwhelmingly that language acquisition is not a direct result of teacher-led, form-focused activities. Willis states "there is clear evidence that input does not equal intake...what is consciously learned is not necessarily incorporated into spontaneous production" (Willis 2001 : 173 et al). Learners will acquire language items in their own time, and in a developmental sequence that cannot be predicted or accounted for by the teacher or syllabus. Acquisition of language items does not occur in a predictable order,

but is dependent on unconscious natural processes unique to each learner.

6. Task-based learning (TBL)

TBL, like PPP, is rooted in a more general notion of CLT (Willis 2001 et al). TBL is, however, an attempt to create the conditions for language acquisition based on the most recent SLA research findings. This approach aims to work with the learner's unconscious processes that allow acquisition to occur. Whereas PPP is geared toward *conformity* to a target language form, TBL is more concerned with compelling learners to express *meanings* with their current language resources in an effort to complete a task (Willis, D. 1996). TBL "sees the learning process as one of learning through doing ? it is by primarily engaging in meaning that the learner's system is encouraged to develop" (Skehan 1996 : 20). TBL rests on the belief that acquisition begins with language use and that learners' experience of communicative English should begin with the expression of meanings.

A task may be defined as "a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome. In other words, learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game, or share and compare experiences" (Willis, J. 1996 : 53). When students engage in tasks, similar to a real-life situation, it is believed to create a need to communicate meanings and compel the learner to confront the language in an effort to solve a problem or achieve a goal ? to reach some type of non-linguistic outcome. The task alone "will create a need for language change and a means to fulfilling that need" (Skehan 1998 : 124). Learners' attempt to communicate using their present language resources is believed to drive forward the acquisition process.

A TBL lesson consists of three stages : task, planning and report (Willis, J. 1996 : 53). In the task stage, students are given a loosely controlled activity such as : *Find out what 5 classmates like and dislike about their school.* Next, in the planning stage, students prepare to present their completed task to the class. The objective here is to direct students' attention toward language accuracy. In the final stage, students report to the class the information they have polished for accuracy during the planning stage. Reporting is a way "to sensitize the learner to the language which needs to be used. In this respect, it has an alerting function intended to help students 'notice the gap' in their inter-language system" (Swain 1995,

Skehan 1998 : 128). At the end of this cycle, after a meaningful context has been established, the teacher draws learners' attention to language form.

7. TBL and learner suitability

TBL is believed to "fulfill the conditions for learning implied by SLA research findings" (Willis, J. 1996:59). However, it would be foolish to relentlessly adhere to such an approach without considering the learners' feelings, and general disposition toward English and CLT. Teachers must assess whether TBL is acceptable to a given group of learners. Motivation, goals, expectations, and aptitude must all be thoughtfully considered. These factors effect learners' reaction to and ultimate acceptance of an approach. Students may not overtly reject an approach, but it may become a source of anxiety and have an indirect, adverse effect on learning. It can be counter-productive for teachers to impose TBL on students if they are not willing to engage in these types of tasks.

Before we examine some of the particular difficulties that TBL can pose in low-level university compulsory classes let us first consider how a TBL model conflicts fundamentally with the traditional Japanese classroom. Naturally, these difficulties become more complex when factors of low aptitude and lack of interest come into play.

8. A TBL model and the traditional Japanese English language classroom

There are at least two basic characteristics of traditional Japanese English language classrooms that may conflict with a TBL model.

First, TBL is a learner-centered approach and requires students to produce their own language and to speak out independently in an attempt to express meaning first. However, Japanese learners have been trained to learn by silently observing, and following their teacher's lead. Students "tend to think quiet, passive, and obedient" learners who perform well on tests are good students (Nozaki 1993 : 28). There is a natural hesitancy among students to express their thoughts autonomously. Anderson (1993 : 103) argues that those students who are "willing to initiate discussion and volunteer original answers are the delight of western instructors. Among their classmates, however, they are often regarded as social misfits."

Japanese learners generally try to avoid standing out among their peers. Aspinall claims "pupils are encouraged to follow the instructions of their teacher and not be ostentatious... learning strategies in secondary schools encourage the idea that there is one correct answer to a given question. This makes conversation exercises where students are encouraged to give original opinions difficult" (Aspinal 2003 : 4,5). Students are usually more concerned with achieving a grammatically accurate utterance than conveying a genuine message. This may be a result of grammar-based syllabuses in the past or the embarrassment associated with giving an incorrect answer. Also, a source of frustration for many foreign teachers is that learners often pause and take time to reach a consensus with neighboring classmates before responding to the teacher.

Secondly, the nature of university entrance exams has had a profound influence on English language education. Entrance exams normally test students' knowledge of English as a rule-based system placing heavy emphasis on reading, grammar and vocabulary, rather than on communication skills. Therefore, high school teachers are obligated to design curriculums which correspond to these tests in order to equip students with the specific skills needed to pass. Many Japanese teachers are keen to make their classes more communicative, but are not sure how under the pressure of preparing students for the entrance exams. And while Monbusho has made attempts at improving the quality of Japanese English teachers and has continued to sponsor the JET program, these efforts "are of little use if the overriding priority is to pass traditional style entrance examinations" (Hood 2001, Aspinall 2003 : 6).

9. Compulsory English from students' perspective

Language acquisition per se, is normally not the primary aim of most low aptitude students in compulsory English classes. At most they are expecting to become more familiar with some basic practical conversational expressions and vocabulary.

Many native-speaking teachers criticize Japanese teachers of English because of their relative failure to equip students with communicative skills. This criticism is based on the observation that after six years of instruction most students have a difficult time carrying on a basic conversation in English. However, Guest (2000:20) makes a valid point by asking:

> If one argues that an ability to apply an academic skill comfortably to real life situations should be
>
> expected of high school graduates, why are teachers of physics, chemistry, history etc. not likewise

criticized? After all, given six years of sociology how many high school students can apply this knowledge in a productive way in society?

To be fair, students who undergo compulsory English should not be expected to master English communication any more than they should be expected to build a house or design a bridge after completing their geometry requirements. Teachers must realize that low-level university students, who have relatively low English aptitude, may not have the motivation or interest necessary to engage in the types of communicative tasks that are associated with TBL.

A TBL approach seems out of tune with the needs of students in this low-level category. From the students' point of view, consider that English is rarely necessary for domestic matters and that English communication skills are not required for most people to attain high social status (Aspinall 2003). If learners do reach a significant level of acquisition through their limited classroom exposure they would likely have few opportunities to maintain their skills and employ their knowledge in practical communication. Compulsory English courses may be more accurately viewed as a good "grounding in a cognitive discipline providing a foundation for real learning at a later stage" (Guest 2000:21).

10. A reconsideration of PPP

As mentioned, when students are not intrinsically motivated, carrying out a TBL approach can be very cumbersome. Teachers who stick to this model based solely on the belief that it drives forward the acquisition process more effectively than PPP, without considering students' disposition, may be in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. For students who are not ready for TBL, the anxiety and negative feelings that are likely to be generated may have a more negative influence on acquisition than PPP ever would. Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis states : "Negative attitudes (including lack of motivation or self-confidence and anxiety) are said to act as a filter, preventing the learner from making use of input, and thus hindering success in language learning (Krashen 1985, Richards 1992 : 10 et al.). For this category of students, PPP may be a more constructive approach since it is less abrasive, and gives students the option of active participation or passive observation. Furthermore, PPP may actually offer some positive influences on the language acquisition processes that are not given proper credit by proponents of TBL (though

based on my argument in 9 about acquisition, this would not be the main reason to favor PPP.)

First, according to PPP critics, PPP suggests that language acquisition occurs in a predictable order. However, this assumption is not inevitable. Students and teachers may freely acknowledge that a PPP lesson can simply be a way of familiarizing students with some language patterns that are frequently used in communication without the expectation of acquisition.

Secondly, TBL maintains the belief that the teacher and the lesson cannot dictate when acquisition will occur. Therefore, TBL encourages students to autonomously "notice the gap" in their target language system (Swain 1995). It promotes consciousness-raising aimed at helping learners assimilate language features appropriately when the individual is developmentally ready. However, if the teacher or the lesson cannot dictate when acquisition will occur, and acquisition depends on unconscious, natural processes unique to each learner, could "noticing the gap" and consciousness-raising not also occur arbitrarily in a PPP lesson?

Finally, Willis, himself an advocate of TBL, acknowledges the usefulness of practice, the central tenet of PPP. He admits that that practice can:

1) enhance learners' familiarity and fluency with holophrasic units.
2) build on the learners' familiarity to promote fluent production.
3) consolidate such units so that they are easily retrievable.
4) be a useful confidence builder.

(adapted from Willis 1990:72,73)

Willis' intention here is to convey a place for practice *after* students have processed the language grammar and meaning in the context of a task. However, for unmotivated students who are not suited to loosely controlled, open-ended tasks to begin with, their teachers may just as soon view Willis' points on practice as the ultimate goal, i.e. mission accomplished!

PPP offers a manageable classroom model that is ideal for low-level compulsory English

courses. For students who are not willing to engage in learner-centered TBL tasks, PPP is way to at least lead them in practice and production activities and put words in their mouth. PPP offers the most positive and diplomatic means to achieving a balance between CLT methodology and learner acceptability for students in this category.

Conclusion

This essay has examined recent changes brought about by English language teaching reform in Japan. With regard to these reforms and the steps that have been taken toward internationalization, teachers should contribute to the process of improving students' communicative language skills. Native-speaking teachers, in particular, should aim to achieve a balance between effective classroom methodology based on SLA research, and what is acceptable in terms of learner disposition. This essay was primarily concerned with the category of learners in low-level compulsory English courses who may have little interest in pursuing English language acquisition.

The most recent SLA research findings have led to TBL. This approach aims to create a more ideal environment for acquisition to occur. TBL can be an effective model for motivated students who may be majoring in English or international communications. However, it can present significant difficulties for the larger category of students who are taking English involuntarily. Balance is important. Students in low-level university compulsory English should be afforded an equal opportunity to improve their practical English skills and should never be sold short based on low aptitude. After all, no one knows for sure who will or will not need English in the future (Hood 2001). Therefore teachers should remain positive in their efforts to help students realize their fullest potential. At the same time teachers should be sensitive to learner feelings and attitudes toward communicative English and adapt a CLT approach that will encourage a positive language learning experience. For low-level university compulsory courses, PPP may be the best approach by which to give learners a basic, yet positive, experience of communicative English.

* Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (MESSC) (name up to end of 2000 when it became *Monbukagakusho* (Ministry of Education and Science) after merging with the Science and Technology Agency)
      (Hood 2001 : 187)

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